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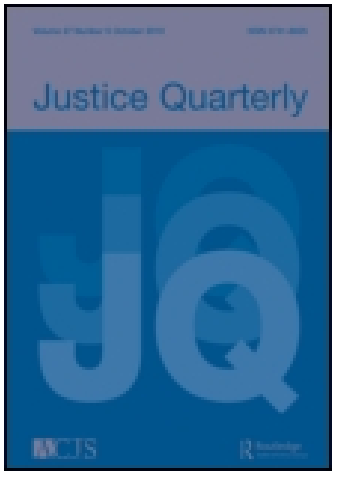

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Covering Victims in the News: What Makes Minority Homicides Newsworthy?

Jeff Gruenewald, Steven M. Chermak and Jesenia M. Pizarro

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The current study builds on the homicide and media criminological literature by examining the newsworthiness of 866 homicide incidents that occurred in Newark, NJ between 1997 and 2007. Recognizing that indicators of newsworthiness may vary by homicide victim gender and race/ethnicity, this study comparatively assesses the effects of suspect, victim, and incident variables on homicides against female, black, and Hispanic victims. A news media distortion analysis is employed which matches specific homicides to their respective local print news coverage. Overall, offense seriousness and victim vulnerability increase the odds of homicides receiving news media attention and being displayed prominently. We also find that different homicide characteristics serve as indicators of newsworthiness depending on victim gender and race/ethnicity. We discuss how cultural stereotypes may shape evaluations of newsworthiness and conclude with implications for theory and future research directions.

Keywords media and crime; race; gender

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Introduction

In this paper, we attempt to refine our understanding of the elements that make female and minority homicides newsworthy. Our approach is to conduct a "media distortion analysis" in which we compare homicide data in a single city to local print news coverage of homicides. Specifically, we examine how incident, victim, and offender elements shape the nature of news media coverage of female and Hispanic homicides in Newark, NJ between 1997 and 2007. Hispanic victim homicides are compared to black victim homicides and female victim homicides are compared to male victim homicides in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the indicators of newsworthiness that best predict which homicides will receive news media attention and which homicides will receive prominent coverage.

This article is an important contribution to this area of research for several reasons. First, past research has found that victims' race and gender statuses shape crime news story decision-making. Studies have shown that violence involving female victims is generally considered more newsworthy than violence involving males, while homicides of racial minorities are considered less newsworthy than whites. One interpretation of these findings is that homicides are considered more or less newsworthy based on how often they occur. Recent studies, however, have shown that homicides targeting underrepresented victim groups are not always considered newsworthy despite their relative frequency or novelty (Bjornstrom, Kaufman, Peterson, & Slater, 2010; Gruenewald, Pizarro, & Chermak, 2009; Lundman, 2003; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). Assuming that all homicides targeting particular victim groups are equally newsworthy is a limitation of past research. To date, scholars have not examined which crime elements make female homicides newsworthy or assessed how female homicide newsworthiness compares to male homicides. Moreover, how evaluations of Hispanic homicide newsworthiness compare to black homicide evaluations has not been explored.

Second, the newsworthiness of Hispanic and female homicide victimization is a neglected, yet increasingly important topic of research. News media coverage decisions are influenced by victim characteristics, and victims of violence vary in their likelihood of being covered by the local news. As violent crimes in the US disproportionately involve black males, past research has largely focused on comparing news coverage of black and white male victims (and offenders). Studying media representations of Hispanic crime participants, however, has become increasingly relevant as America's Hispanic population continues to increase rapidly. Although population trends have slowed for whites and blacks, the number of Hispanics in the US is rising dramatically. For example, in 2000, Hispanics accounted for 12% of the total population, but are projected to account for 25% by 2050 (US Bureau of the Census, 2000). Moreover, between 2000 and 2006, Hispanics accounted for 50% of the nation's growth, and their growth rate was three times higher than the total

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population. Hispanics make up the dominant ethnic minority in the US and news media coverage of Hispanic violence may be shaped by cultural stereotypes unique from those of blacks and whites. For instance, research has shown that media may perpetuate different stereotypes of Hispanics as aggressive and lazy (Castro, 1998; Chiricos & Escholz, 2002), and news about violence involving ethnic minorities is often linked to controversial issues like illegal immigration (Mann & Zatz, 1998; Martinez & Lee, 1998). Other than being underrepresented in the news media (Dixon & Linz, 2000), little is known about what makes Hispanic victims newsworthy.

Third, female victims tend to be overrepresented in the news, and this may help explain why females who watch the news have increased fear of crime (Chiricos, Escholz, & Gertz, 1997). Indeed, research has shown that the public may overestimate the number of crime victims who are female and members of other "vulnerable populations" (e.g. elderly) (Graber, 1980, p. 55). While female homicide victims may be considered more "worthy" of news coverage than males (Chermak, 1995, p. 63), research on the newsworthiness of female homicide events that can involve a range of characters and circumstances remains lacking. This is particularly important to examine considering the changing role and status of victims and women within the criminal justice system (Crawford & Goodey, 2000).

Fourth, past research has established that violence is overemphasized in the news (Chermak, 1995; Graber, 1980), and that this coverage can elicit fear, negative emotions, and may even mislead some to overestimate their risk of victimization (Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Graber, 1980, p. 20). Of particular concern is how the representation of offenders and victims impacts public expectations about criminal offending and vulnerabilities to victimization (see Bjornstrom et al., 2010). In general, media research indicates that minorities are overrepresented as offenders and underrepresented as victims (Gruenewald et al., 2009; Chiricos & Escholz, 2002). This representation might promote hostility towards and fear of minorities and cause the public and criminal justice professionals to devalue minority victimization (see Bjornstrom et al., 2010; Chermak, 1995; Chermak et al., 2010; Dixon & Linz, 2000).

Prior Research

Press coverage of racial/ethnic minorities was virtually absent prior to the civil rights movement (Bramlett-Solomon & Hernandez, 2003). Although concerns about presentation and the stereotypical representation of minorities was emphasized in the Kerner Commission Report and several other reports in the 1960s, more recent research has indicated that Hispanics and blacks are still covered in the press in a stereotypical and prejudiced manner (Campbell, 1995; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Martindale, 1986, 1990; Rome, 2004; Wilson & Gutierrez, 1985). Moreover, there is very little research that examines press

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coverage of Hispanics or compares coverage of Hispanics and blacks (Chermak, Gruenewald, & Pizarro, 2009; Chiricos & Escholz, 2002). Although there is a larger body of research examining media representations of other minorities, the "findings about the nature of media representations of crime vis-à-vis race-ethnic groups are not straightforward" (Bjornstrom et al., 2010, p. 270).

Victims provide the "human-interest element" of crime news (Chermak, 1995, p. 62). Despite the importance of victims in crime news decision-making, most studies examining representations of crime participants focus primarily on crime suspects. Moreover, past media and crime research that has included victims primarily focuses on how racial-ethnic minorities compare to whites, saying little about the similarities and differences in media coverage of black and Hispanic victims. This section draws from the available past research relevant to the race-ethnic and gender representations and typifications of crime victims. First, we discuss studies comparing representations of racial-ethnic minority victims to white victims. Second, studies comparing representations of crime victims relative to their actual victimization rates are then briefly reviewed. Third, a review of studies utilizing a media distortion analysis approach to comparatively examine local news (print) media coverage of specific violent crimes (usually homicide) is presented.'

Victim Race-ethnicity and Gender in the News

A number of studies have examined how victims are portrayed in print and television news media compared to suspects. These "inter-role" studies begin to illuminate differences in the media representations of victims across racial-ethnic categories (Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003). Scholars have found that racial-ethnic minorities were more likely to appear as crime suspects than victims, and that black crime participants were likely linked to violence and danger in television nightly news compared to whites (Campbell, 1995; Chiricos & Escholz, 2002; Dixon & Linz, 2000; Dixon et al., 2003; Entman, 1992, 1994; Entman & Rojecki, 2000). As for Hispanics, other studies have found that Hispanic crime participants are largely ignored in the news media (Mendez-Mendez & Alverio, 2003), and when covered, they are often linked to negative news topics such as terrorism and illegal immigration (Entman, 1990).

Some other studies of crime and media have taken an "inter-reality" approach by comparing representations of black and Hispanic crime victims to actual victimization. In one study, Dixon and Linz (2000) demonstrated how Hispanics were largely ignored by television news media as victims or suspects. On the other hand, black homicide victims were covered proportionately to their actual victimization, though overrepresented as suspects.

Meyers (2004) has also examined how race and gender typifications have influenced news media portrayals of black women. She found that black women who are victims of crime usually only receive media attention when the crimes are extraordinary (Meyers, 1997, 2004). Her research also found that news media coverage of black female victims tends to blame them for

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their own victimization, assigning culpability to their dress, behaviors, and the company they choose to keep (Meyers, 1997). Indirectly and directly implicating them for their own victimization, female victims are often described as promiscuous, oversexed, and labeled "Jezebels" (Meyers, 2004).

Bjornstrom et al. (2010) significantly expanded other important research in this area. There are several reasons why this study is important, including that it provides an analysis of television news, it examines a national sample of news stories, compares whites to both blacks and Hispanics, and evaluates the findings from five explanatory perspectives: power structure, market share, normal crimes, racial threat, and racial privileging. They study what variables influenced ethnic and racial representations, and focus on: "(1) how do situational components of crime stories and aspects of the social structural context, such as the race and ethnic composition, and level of violent crime in the area, influence variation in outcomes and (2) to what degree do such predictors have such similar or different effects for representations of perpetrators versus victims" (Bjornstrom et al., 2010, p. 271). The authors emphasized that "great attention must be given to the factors that predict crime news portrayals about ethnicity and race" (p. 270). There are several important findings presented in the study, but the following are particularly relevant to the present study. First, Hispanic perpetrators were underreported compared to whites generally, but there was a greater reporting of Hispanics when the Hispanic population grew. Second, stories involving female victims were more likely to be reported when homicide perpetrators were white, but homicides were less likely to be reported for white female victims when perpetrators were black. Finally, the victimization of minorities was marginalized, but no single theoretical perspective was sufficient to understand the representation of race.

News Media Distortion and Homicide

In one particular area of growing research sometimes referred to as media distortion analysis, scholars have examined how homicides are covered in the local print news (Gruenewald et al., 2009; Johnstone, Hawkins, & Michener, 1994; Lundman, 2003; Paulsen, 2003; Peelo, Francis, Soothill, Pearson, & Ackerly, 2004; Pritchard, 1985; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Sorenson, Manz, & Berk, 1998; Weiss & Chermak, 1998; Wilbanks, 1984). This type of inter-reality comparison of homicides is unique from other media and crime studies because crime data are linked up to their specific crime coverage. A number of consistent findings have emerged from prior news media distortion analyses. Homicides involving white victims have been more likely to be covered compared to homicides targeting black and Hispanic victims (Johnstone et al., 1994; Paulsen, 2003; Peelo et al., 2004; Sorenson et al., 1998). Homicides involving black and Hispanic victims have also received significantly less news coverage compared to whites (Lundman, 2003; Paulsen, 2003; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Weiss & Chermak, 1998; Wilbanks, 1984). Past research has also found that

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victims' gender influences local news media decision-making. Just as youth and elderly victims have received more news coverage, females have also been overrepresented in the news and received more coverage than their counterparts (Sorenson et al., 1998).

Although unquestionably rare, some scholars suggest that cultural typifications of homicide participants can be more influential for evaluations of newsworthiness than their relative frequency. Countering the novelty hypothesis, Pritchard and Hughes (1997) discovered that some homicides of females did not receive increased news coverage despite their statistical rarity. Lundman (2003) also suggested that novelty of crime elements was an inadequate explanation for newsworthiness evaluations as homicides that do not adhere to stereotypical profiles of crime participants usually receive less coverage. For example, he found that white homicides did not receive more news coverage than homicides involving black victims in Columbus, Ohio. He concluded that homicide participants that did not conform to race and gender stereotypes of typical victims and offenders received only average or less news coverage. For instance, a white female on white male homicide, although rare, received less coverage than types of other rare homicides involving black male offenders and white victims.

In another study, Gruenewald et al. (2009) examined how offender and victim race/ethnicity and gender categories influenced evaluations of homicide newsworthiness. This study was unique in that it was able to consider how combinations of race and gender statuses for Hispanic and black victims and offenders influenced media decision-making in a high-crime city. The authors found that homicides involving Hispanic offenders were considered newsworthy, while stories of Hispanic victims were not. They also found that crime stories involving black females, though rare occurrences, were also considered less newsworthy compared to stories involving more common homicides involving black males.

In addition to victim race-ethnicity and gender, expectations for how news print media choose to cover local homicides have very much to do with the characteristics and circumstances of homicide events. Victims targeted in homicides involving deviant motivational circumstances, such as gang and drug-related homicides, may be viewed as victims of cultural deviance (Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). In effect, victims deemed to have been involved in deviant behaviors precipitating their victimization may be viewed as less "worthy" of the victim status (Chermak, 1995). Therefore, homicides involving victims presumed to be involved in these sorts of violence should receive less news media attention.

Other extraordinary homicide situations may also increase the newsworthiness of homicides. Occurrences in which strangers were targeted are rare, as most homicides target known victims. Thus, stranger homicides are likely viewed as extraordinary and particularly threatening to the public. Interestingly, recent research has found that homicides involving firearms receive more news print coverage than those homicides committed with other weapons

(blunt objects or knives) despite being common (Gruenewald et al., 2009); however, these findings contradict other earlier research (Buckler & Travis, 2005). It may be that homicides involving non-firearms are viewed as less threatening and less newsworthy compared to gun-related occurrences. Some have found that homicides involving multiple suspects receive more news print media coverage compared to single-suspect homicides (Paulsen, 2003). In addition to being considered extraordinary, newsworthiness evaluations of multiple-suspect homicides likely hinge on their perceived seriousness and threat to public safety.

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The Current Study

This study significantly enhances how situational components of a crime story impact the representation of race and gender in the news. The present study is a contribution to this line of research for five reasons. First, we compare the actual incidence of homicide to the representation of homicides in the local print news. Most media studies base conclusions on news media content only, but the current study builds on the media distortion analysis approach and examines news print media coverage of all homicides occurring in Newark, NJ between 1997 and 2007. Second, because we had access to the homicide investigation files for each incident, we were able to examine the impact of several situational variables not examined in previous studies. For example, Bjornstrom et al. (2010, p. 289) specifically noted that it would be important to examine drug use, age of offenders and victims, gang affiliation, and victim-offender relationships. We examine each of these factors and several others to better understand the context of media reporting of minorities in the news.

Third, one of the challenges of studying the representation of race/ethnicity in the news is that it is usually not specifically identified in press stories. Race and ethnicity may sometimes be identified in pictures and mug shots, but only if included by the news organization and the researcher accesses hard or electronic copies that include these images. Research by Bjornstorm et al. (2010) and Chiricos and Escholz (2002) is important because it examines television images and thus they were able to identify racial images from a high percentage of stories because of the importance of video to television news. In the current study, we start with the investigative files of all homicides, which included the race and ethnicity for all victims and identified suspects. Thus, our study extends past important work examining racial images in print news media.

Fourth, while some theoretical perspectives have in the past largely focused on whites and non-whites (e.g. racial threat), this study does not assume homogeneity across homicides and homicide news coverage is not assumed across race-ethnicity categories. This research is unique because it comparatively examines local news print media coverage of homicides involving Hispanic victims separately as victim-defined subgroups. This study also builds on recent research examining news print media coverage of homicides in a

predominately black city in which Hispanics make up the dominant minority (Gruenewald et al., 2009; Pizarro, Chermak, & Gruenewald, 2007).

Finally, this study also contributes to media and crime literature by examining the newsworthiness of homicides targeting female victims. Prior media distortion analyses have concluded that victim gender is an indicator of homicide newsworthiness, and other content analyses have found similarities and differences in how some female victims are portrayed (Meyers, 1997, 2004). This study is the first, however, to empirically and comparatively examine the newsworthy crime elements of female and male victims.

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Theoretical Orientation and Expectations

Two theoretical perspectives can be drawn upon to explain similarities and differences in the coverage of homicides across victim race-ethnicity and gender categories. Since we are primarily interested in the types of factors that influence the coverage of homicide, conclusions regarding crime news production and newsworthiness are relevant. Scholars examining the construction of crime news have examined how news media organizations influence crime coverage through structural and cultural practices (Chermak, 1995; Cohen & Young, 1981; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Kaniss, 1991; Tuchman, 1973). Structurally, specific reporters are organized to cover certain crime beats or geographic areas. Crime beat reporters rely on police and other sources to learn about crimes that occur on their beat. Based on this information, reporters along with their editors have to make quick decisions about which crimes to cover, highlight, and ignore. Practical considerations such as available information, the prominence of other news stories, and requests by police to withhold information shape coverage decisions (Chermak, 1995). Culturally, news organizations have unique work environments that promote shared understandings of newsworthy victims, and "standards related to newsworthiness" (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987, 1989). News organizations must operate to sell news; therefore, newsmaking decisions have to be made within the context of audience preferences (Chermak, 1994; Gans, 1979; Kaniss, 1991; Sheley & Ashkins, 1981). Audiences are most interested in and likely to consume serious forms of violence, such as homicide, and extraordinary violence is often considered the most marketable news item (Chermak, 1995). Certain victim demographics and behaviors are inherently emotional, thus grabbing the public's attention (Chermak, 1995).

News media workers need to belong to particular groups that provide values, norms, and world views (Tajfel, 1981). Past research has suggested that the cultural norms of groups leading news organizations can affect story selection (Klein & Naccarato, 2003; Poindexter et al., 2003). For instance, those in power are more likely to cover crime participants different from themselves or "outgroups" less favorably (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Romer, Jamieson, & De Coteau, 1998). Those in power may be more likely to run stories that are of interest to

them, such as stories in which they are the victims, and downplay stories involving the victimization of the out-group. Klein and Naccarato (2003) have also suggested that the dominant group is most likely to consume news that they identify with. Drawing from the racial privilege perspective (e.g. Baumer, Messner, & Rosenfeld, 2000; Bontrager, Bales, & Chiricos, 2005), some have suggested that crimes against minorities are seen as less threatening and deemed less serious by newsmakers (Bjornstrom et al., 2010, p. 276). Thus, news media may represent racial-ethnic minorities less, as well as more unfavorably, if doing so furthers the organizational goal of selling news. In contrast, violence perpetrated against members of the racial-ethnic majority group would be considered more newsworthy than violence against minority groups, especially if perpetrated by majority group offenders.

Another perspective has suggested that cultural typifications of "typical" crime elements and crime participants shape newsmakers' evaluations of newsworthiness. That is, news media rely on common notions of "normal crimes" (Sudnow, 1965), including how crime victims should appear. It is also possible to integrate tenets of the criminal event perspective (CEP), which conceptualizes crimes as dynamic, multi-dimensional events (Meier, Kennedy, & Sacco, 2001). As per CEP, the average crime follows a script including who is likely to be involved and how everyday interactions can escalate into fatal transactions within certain contexts (Meier et al., 2001). The typical homicide script is that of an intra-racial black on black incident that occurs with a firearm (Fox & Zawitz, 2007). Homicide scripts also portray victims as individuals who were victimized due to no fault of their own. These scripts in turn indicate what a "normal" homicide should look like, and have an effect on which homicides are covered in the news. Indeed, not all homicides receive the same amount of media attention, and some homicides fail to make the nightly news (Chermak, 1995). This attention could be the result of how much the incident deviates from the homicide script. Interestingly, homicides involving racial-ethnic minority victims and victims involved in unhealthy or culturally deviant lifestyles (e.g. drugs, gangs, etc.) are often the first to be overlooked (Chermak, 1995; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). Scholars have found that victims that maintain less social ties get less news media attention (Gruenewald et al., 2009; Lundman, 2003; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997).

Although originally developed to explain court sentencing outcomes, focal concerns theory (e.g. Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2000; Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Kramer, 1998) can serve to further explain this pattern. This theory posits that factors such blameworthiness, culpability, dangerousness, and community protection may impact the amount of attention a crime receives. Blameworthiness and culpability refer to the roles of victims and offenders in a crime. For example, an offender is considered less blameworthy if the victim precipitated the incident by physically attacking the offender, or was considered dangerous due to their prior criminal involvement. On the other hand, variables, such as age, decrease the blameworthiness of victims since they might be perceived as

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incapable of precipitating the offense and/or defending themselves due to their age. Attribution of dangerousness and community protection refers to the amount of risk the offender and/or crime poses to society. For example, incidents involving firearms might receive more coverage because these types of weapon are perceived as posing a greater level of risk to citizens due to their lethality, and thus, are more serious.

Scholars have suggested that the news media are not the only ones to rely on common narratives in order to understand and make assumptions about who is involved in violent crime. Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) inferred from their research that the public rely on crime scripts when consuming crime stories and associate particular types of crimes with certain types of crime participants. In addition, research has found that police depend on implicit racial stereotypes during arrests (Beckett, Nyrop, & Pfingst, 2006), and that court officials depend on racial stereotypes of criminals to make decisions (Steen, Engen, & Gainey, 2005). For example, Auerhahn's (2007) examination of homicide offender sentencing in Philadelphia found that race emerged as significant in a three-way interaction between being black or Hispanic, under the age of 25, and prior criminal history, which she called the "black/Hispanic criminal stereotype." The interaction suggested that black/Hispanic males under the age of 25 who had a prior criminal history at the time of the homicide received a minimum sentence length that was significantly longer than offenders that did not exhibit this combination of characteristics.

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Research Expectations

Based primarily on prior research and theoretical orientations in this area, a number of research expectations regarding the local news media coverage of homicide victims are possible. First, we expect that extraordinary or novel homicides, such as inter-racial homicides and those occurrences involving multiple suspects are more likely to impact news coverage due to their novelty and because they might be considered more serious. In addition, we think that gun homicides will be considered more newsworthy than homicides involving other weapons because they are viewed as posing a greater risk to citizens. Second, homicides involving worthy or "not blameworthy" victims are expected to receive increased news media coverage. It is also expected that stranger homicides, and occurrences involving especially young or old victims, will receive significantly more news coverage because they fit the common accepted homicide script, and might be considered more serious. On the other hand, we expect that homicides involving victims deemed to have prior deviant lifestyles will receive significantly less news media coverage. Third, we expect cultural stereotypes and understandings of the "normal" homicide will result in significant differences in the assessment of newsworthiness of female and Hispanic victim homicides relative to their counterparts.

Methods

This study examines news coverage of homicide incidents occurring within the US from 1997 to 2007 in Newark, NJ. The length of time is another unique component of this study as most prior studies using "media distortion analysis" have used shorter time periods (Chermak, 1998; Johnstone, Hawkins & Michener, 1994; Peelo et al., 2004; Sorenson, Peterson, & Berk, 1998; Weiss & Chermak, 1998). Newark, NJ provides an interesting opportunity for study because the population of the city as a whole and crime victims are mostly minority. In fact, there were only 28 (3.2%) homicides over this 10-year period with a white victim.

The unit of analysis for this study is the homicide incident. A small number of incidents that would not necessarily be considered homicides, such as vehicular homicides, are included in the data-set because they were initially considered homicides by police, and thus, also by crime reporters. Overall, the data consist of 866 homicide incidents that occurred from 1 January 1997 to 31 December 2007. The analysis is based on a database that includes data from the Newark Police Department homicide investigation file. Since we had access to the actual homicide investigation files, there was an opportunity to collect rich detail about the incident, suspects, and victims, including variables that have not previously been examined in media studies. Importantly, having access to these files allowed us to explore numerous victim variables, including gender, age, race/ethnicity, employment status, criminal history, and involvement in gangs.

All newspaper articles were extracted from *The Star-Ledger*, Newark's daily and by far most widely read newspaper. We searched for all articles written between 1997 and 2010. The design for this study allowed us to link specific homicides to all news articles that may have been written about them. Information from homicide files, such as names of homicide victims and suspects, functioned as keywords that were inputted into *Access World News* from *NewsBank*, an online searchable database that provides access to all *The Star-Ledger* news stories since 1996. Searching for homicide news coverage in the online news archive made it possible to identify which homicide occurrences received news media attention or ignored, as well as how prominent coverage was for those homicides covered. For those homicides that were covered by *The Star-Ledger*, all articles specifically about a particular homicide in our sample were collected and a number of content categories were coded in order to assess news salience.

Measures

Variables are coded and basic descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. We also present the descriptive results by victim minority status. Three measures of news salience were created for our dependent variables. In the

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Table 1 Descriptive statistics for all dependent and independent measures

	Variable description	Total victims ($n = 866$) %/Mean	Black victims ($n = 717$) %/Mean	Hispanic victims ($n = 116$) %/Mean	Female victims ($n = 114$) %/Mean	Male victims ($n = 752$) %/Mean
Covered		63.7	64.2	64.7	64.0	63.7
Number of specific articles		1.03	0.97	1.39	1.63	0.94
Number of specific words		477.94	439.64	661.77	820.75′	425.97
Victim						
Age	-	29.41	28.34	31.73	34.59	28.62
Black	1 = black, 0 = all others	82.9	-	-	72.8	84.3
Hispanic	1 = Hispanic, 0 = all others	13.4	-	-	9.6	12.8
White	1 = white, 0 = all others	3.2	-	-	17.5	2.3
Other race	1 = other race, 0 = all others	0.5	-	-	0.0	0.5
Male	1 = male, 0 = female	86.8	96.0	97.8	-	-
Deviant behavior	4 = four indicators of deviant behavior (prior record, drug involvement, gang involvement, other illegal activity), 3 = three indicators, 2 = two indicators, 1 = one indicator, 0 = no indicator	1.40	1.51	0.91	0.75	1.49
Suspect						
Age	-	25.71	25.60	25.46	29.85	25.06
Black	1 = black, 0 = all others	87.77	96.22	43.18	77.38	89.35
Hispanic	1 = Hispanic, 0 = all others	10.97	3.59	55.68	17.86	9.93

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White	1 = white, 0 = all others	0.94	0.00	0.00	3.57	0.54
Other race	1 = other race, 0 = all others	0.31	0.19	1.14	1.19	0.18
Motive						
Domestic	1 = domestic, 0 = all else	14.15	13.60	15.31	46.51	9.16
Drug/gang	1 = drug or gang, 0 = all else	25.66	27.20	17.35	11.63	27.82
Dispute	1 = dispute, 0 = all else	38.26	40.04	36.73	25.58	40.22
Robbery	1 = robbery, 0 = all else	12.60	9.96	20.41	6.98	13.46
Other	1 = other, 0 = all else	9.33	9.20	10.20	9.30	9.34
Firearm used	1 = firearm used, 0 = other weapon used	75.7	78.7	65.5	36.8	81.6
Single suspects	1 = single suspect, 0 = multiple suspects	62.9	64.3	56.4	74.4	61.3
Stranger victim	1 = stranger victim, 0 = known victim	27.1	23.0	43.8	16.3	28.7

past, scholars have stressed the importance of measuring different types of news salience in order to capture its various dimensions (Buckler & Travis, 2005; Paulsen, 2003). Although most often utilized as independent variables, communication scholars have attempted to explicate the various dimensions of news salience (Kiousis, 2004). The current study captures two dimensions of news salience, namely news attention and news prominence. The first two dependent variable measures capture the extent of news attention that homicides received. The first measure of news attention is whether or not a homicide received one or more news articles in *The Star-Ledger* (1 = covered, 0 = not covered). Approximately 63% of the homicides that occurred between 1997 and 2007 received news media attention in *The Star-Ledger*.

The second measure of news attention was calculated by summing the number of articles written specifically about each homicide. Thus, this dependent variable measured the number of times that a homicide was given news attention. General news articles, or news stories that simply mentioned a homicide but did not focus on it, were not counted. Since we collected articles through 2010, it is reasonable to expect that majority of homicides in our data-set had been completely processed by the criminal justice system, though it is possible that additional articles might be presented about appeals or prison releases about a particular incident. On average, there was just one specific news article written about the incidents examined.

The third dependent variable measure of news salience captures the prominence of homicide news stories. Prominence is another dimension of news salience that measures the intensity of news coverage or how much space was devoted to a single homicide when covered in a newspaper. While news attention is largely a function of reporters' crime story decision-making, news prominence measures editors' evaluations of newsworthiness (Clayman & Reisner, 1998). Homicide stories that are displayed prominently or intensely are more likely to be read and may serve as a cue to readers that they are important. Homicide story prominence was measured by the number of specific words written about a particular homicide. This measure has been used by others studying homicide news coverage (Chermak & Chapman, 2007; Paulsen, 2003; Weiss & Chermak, 1998). Only words from news articles specifically about a particular homicide were counted. On average there were approximately 477 words written about each homicide. Whether or not a crime received front-page coverage is another measure of news prominence used in prior research; however, we found that only 35 homicides received front-page coverage one or more times in *The Star-Ledger*. Because there were not enough cases to statistically compare homicides across sample subgroups for this dependent variable, we do not report these findings.

Table 1 also includes the independent measures examined for all homicides, and then for black, Hispanic, female, and male homicides. We created three victim measures: age, gender, and deviant lifestyle. These variables capture the extent of blameworthiness and vulnerability of the victims. Blameworthiness refers to the extent that the victim may have precipitated the homicide

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incident. Conversely, vulnerability refers to victims who are not capable to defend themselves from the offenders. For example, victims who are young (i.e. children) or older (i.e. the elderly) may be considered more vulnerable and defenseless due to their age. Additionally, incidents involving these two age groups are not common, and thus, do not fit the homicide script. Similar to age stereotypes, gender may also lead to perceptions that females are more vulnerable than men due to physical strength or lack of resources. Finally, victims who lead a deviant lifestyle prior to their murder may be considered more blameworthy by the public.

Age is measured as a continuous variable. Newark homicide victims were approximately 29 years old on average. Gender is binary-coded (with females serving as the reference category). Nearly 90% of the victims were male. Finally, we created a deviant lifestyle scale that includes four indicators of deviant behavior (prior record, drug involvement, gang involvement, and other illegal activity, such as gambling or prostitution). Each victim received a score from 0 (no indication of deviant behavior) to 4 (sum of the four potential indicators present). On average, less than two deviant lifestyle indicators were present. Hispanic and female victims were somewhat older, and scored lower on the deviant scale compared to blacks and male victims.

We include two suspect measures: age and race/ethnicity. Similar to the victim variables, age and race/ethnicity could also have an effect on how homicide incidents are portrayed in the news since they could elicit perceptions of risk, blameworthiness, and vulnerability. Suspect age was also measured as a continuous variable, with suspects being just over 25 years old. The suspects who murdered black and Hispanic victims were similar in age, but those that murdered females were somewhat older. Approximately 88% of the suspects were black, 11% were Hispanic, 1% were white, and .3% were other races/ethnicities. A higher percentage of black suspects and a lower percentage of Hispanic suspects killed males compared to females. Most black victims were killed by black suspects. Approximately 43% of Hispanic victims were killed by black suspects, and 56% were killed by Hispanics.

We also examine motive, weapon, number of suspects, and victim—offender relationship. Motive taps into two aspects of the homicide. First, it measures whether the incident fits the homicide script, or whether it is an extraordinary novel type of crime. For instance, as mentioned previously the average homicide script is one of two African-American males engaging in a verbal or physical dispute that results in an act of lethal violence due to one of the males having a firearm in his possession. Cases that deviate from this, such as robberies involving strangers, may receive more media attention because they do not fit the script and thus the "norm" of homicide. Second, motive also taps into the vulnerability and blameworthiness of the victim. For example, a drug-motivated homicide might elicit the perception of a victim who was involved in illegal activities, and thus, might be responsible for their victimization. Conversely, a domestic incident might elicit the perception of a vulnerable victim who was subjected to abuse by a family member or intimate partner. The

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remaining independent variables tap into the seriousness of the incident. Seriousness refers to the extent that characteristics of the homicide pose a threat to the general citizenry. As mentioned previously the homicide script often involves a single offender who is familiar to the victim at the time of the homicide. Thus, homicides with multiple offenders and those involving strangers deviate from the norm, and thus, may appear as more serious. Additionally, stranger homicides can elicit the perception that anyone can be a victim, and not just those who have dangerous relationships. Firearm homicides, on the other hand, do not deviate from the norm, but due to the lethality of the weapon may be perceived as more serious.

We binary coded several types of motive, including whether the homicide motive was domestic, drug/gang, dispute, robbery, or some other motive. Approximately 14% of the homicides were domestic, 26% were drug or gang, 38% were disputes, 12% were robberies, and 9% were other motives. The domestic homicides serve as the reference category. Black victim homicides were more likely to be drug- or gang-motivated, and were less likely to be motivated by robbery compared to Hispanic victims. The motive for female victim homicides was much more likely to be domestic and less likely to be drug/gangs, disputes, and robbery compared to males. The second measure is whether a firearm was the murder weapon. A firearm was the murder weapon in nearly 75% of the incidents. Hispanic victims were somewhat less likely to be murdered with a firearm compared to blacks, and females were much less likely to be murdered by firearms compared to males. The third measure related to the number of suspects involved in an incident. This variable is binary-coded and 63% of the incidents are single-suspect incidents. Female and black homicides were somewhat more likely to be single-suspect. The final variable is also binary-coded and measures the relationship between the suspect and victim. Approximately 27% of the homicides were stranger homicides. Hispanic and male homicides were more likely to be stranger homicides.

Analysis

Binary logistic regression was used to examine the effects of the homicide characteristics on the binary-coded "covered" news media attention indicator. Negative binomial regression was used to examine the effects of the homicide variables on the continuous dependent variable, number of specific articles. Negative binomial regression was employed because it is the appropriate statistical technique to use when the distribution of the dependent variable is both positively skewed and over dispersed (Long, 1997, p. 230). Robust regression was used to examine the effects of homicide variables on number of specific words. Diagnostic tests revealed a number of outlier cases that could potentially bias results. Because we felt that these cases could possibly help us understand the news value of high-profile homicides in Newark, we did not want to completely remove them from the analysis. Therefore, we relied on

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robust regression in order to avoid removing these potentially influential cases from our analysis (Berk, 1990; Hampel, Ronchetti, Rousseeuw, & Stahel, 1986; Rousseeuw & Leroy, 1987; Western, 1995). In short, robust regression controls for the influence of outlier cases by assigning weights to observations based on the size of their residuals. Those cases with higher residuals are assigned lower weights thus mitigating their influence. Finally, in order to compare findings across regression models, we relied on a particular formula to calculate *Z-scores* in order to statistically compare variable regression coefficients (and standard errors) across subsamples (Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, & Piquero, 1998).

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Findings

Figure 1 presents the number of homicides that occurred each year and the percentage covered in the local print news. On average, 68 homicide incidents occurred each year between 1997 and 2007. The highest number was 83 incidents in 2005 and 2006, and the lowest was 42 in 1998. Most homicide incidents received at least some coverage, but there was some variation when comparing years. For example, only 47% of the incidents were covered in 2000 and only 34% were covered in 2001. In contrast, 81% of the homicides were covered in 1999, and 89% were covered in 2003. An examination of these noteworthy years suggest that in 2000 there were very few novel incidents, while in 2001 news coverage on national security and terrorism took precedent over homicide coverage. Conversely, 1999 and 2003 had on average more incidents involving multiple offenders, females, and domestic homicides.

Figure 2 presents a graph depicting the homicide data by the dependent variable, number of articles. This figure shows that a large number of homicides, even when they were covered in Newark news print media, received only a single article. These articles usually coincided with the arrest of a suspect. As the number of articles increased, the number of homicides that accounted for multiple articles decreased dramatically. For example, there were only 35

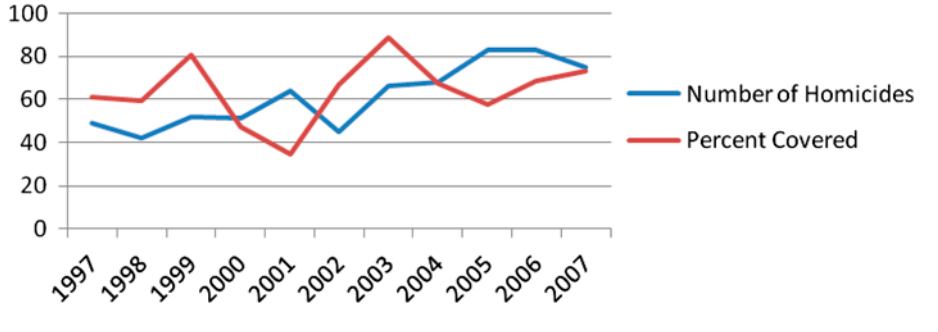

Figure 1 Number of homicides and percent covered by year.

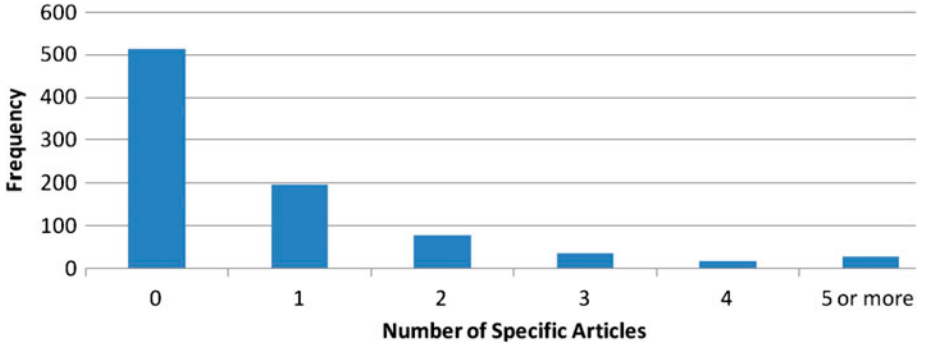

Figure 2 Frequency by number of specific articles ($n = 866$).

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homicides that were presented in three articles, 16 homicides that were presented in four articles, and 28 homicides presented in five or more articles.

Table 2 presents the results for local news print media coverage, attention, and prominence, for Hispanic and black victims. Victim characteristics had a slight influence on whether a homicide was selected for news media coverage. Older victims increased the likelihood of Hispanic victim homicide received coverage ($p < .10$). The older the victim, the more likely a Hispanic victim homicide was covered in one or more articles. Intra-racial homicides were significantly less likely to be covered for black victims, but the results are only marginally significant. It is interesting that the motive of the incident had no effect on coverage of black victim homicides, but each motive examined impacted whether Hispanic victim homicides were covered in one or more articles. Homicides targeting Hispanics involving drug/gang, robbery, dispute, and other motivational circumstances compared to domestic issues receive significantly less attention. The findings are significantly different for motive when comparing across victim subgroups. The use of firearms increased the statistical likelihood of coverage for both Hispanic and black victim homicides. Single suspect and victim—offender relationship had no effect on news media coverage of Newark homicides.

The results for the number of articles written about Hispanic and black victim homicides are somewhat different. Victim age had no effect on the number of local news articles written about Hispanic and black victim homicides, but there were significantly less articles written about male victims for both types of victim homicides ($p < .10$). Fewer articles were written on black victim homicides when there was evidence of victims' deviant lifestyle. There were no significant differences across victim variables across victim subgroups. Age of the suspect had no effect on the number of articles written, but intra-racial homicides receive significantly less coverage compared to inter-racial homicides for both Hispanic and black victims. Again, there was no difference when comparing victim subgroups. The results for motive when the victim was Hispanic are similar to the coverage results. Homicides of Hispanic victims

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Table 2 News media coverage of Hispanic and black homicide victims

	Covered or not?			Number of specific articles			Number of specific words		
	Hispanic victims ($n=116$)	Black victims ($n=717$)		Hispanic victims ($n=116$)	Black victims ($n=717$)		Hispanic victims ($n=116$)	Black victims ($n=717$)	
	B(SE)	*B*(SE)	*p* value	*B*(SE)	*B*(SE)	*p* value	*B*(SE)	*B*(SE)	*p* value
Victim									
Age	.05 (.03)†	−.00 (.01)	$p \leqslant .1$	.02 (.01)	−.001 (.01)		−0.85 (8.70)	5.25 (2.83)†	
Male	1.15 (1.47)	−.37 (.35)		−.79 (.53)†	−.40 (.25)†		−855.87 (347.46)*	−176.19 (93.75)†	$p \leqslant .1$
Deviant Behavior	−.10 (.58)	−.14 (.13)		−.13 (.32)	−.25 (.10)**		−253.30 (219.33)	−87.51 (36.59)*	
Suspect									
Age	−.11 (.05)*	−.01 (.01)	$p \leqslant .05$	−.02 (.02)	−.01 (.01)		−14.69 (15.56)	−1.69 (4.69)	
Same Race/ ethnicity	−.62 (.70)	−1.02 (.65)†		−1.21 (.39)**	−1.08 (.36)**		390.41 (260.95)	92.37 (138.54)	
Motive									
Drug/gang	−5.39 (2.44)*	.55 (.40)	$p \leqslant .01$	−1.85 (.99)†	−.02 (.32)	$p \leqslant .1$	164.23 (660.08)	−96.26 (124.77)	
Dispute	−3.66 (1.79)*	.30 (.34)	$p \leqslant .05$	−1.43 (.70)*	.23 (.27)	$p \leqslant .1$	258.76 (467.31)	−51.14 (106.30)	
Robbery	−4.83 (2.30)*	.30 (.50)	$p \leqslant .05$	−2.05 (.99)*	.74 (.38)*	$p \leqslant .01$	442.67 (673.56)	815.32 (151.88)	
Other	−4.07 (2.17)†	.37 (.46)	$p \leqslant .05$	−1.55 (.97)†	.38 (.36)	$p \leqslant .1$	132.73 (569.71)	156.55 (138.52)	
Firearm Used	3.72 (.99)***	.64 (.29)*	$p \leqslant .01$	1.65 (.40)***	.17 (.22)	$p \leqslant .001$	341.30 (301.73)	242.13 (90.80)**	
Single Suspects	−1.02 (.78)	−.07 (.25)		−1.02 (.38)**	−.36 (.18)*	$p \leqslant .1$	−342.25 (283.24)	−58.97 (75.31)	
Stranger Victim	.01 (.76)	−.04 (.28)		.24 (.41)	.49 (.20)*		75.57 (256.97)	14.06 (81.31)	
Constant	4.01 (1.82)*	1.85 (.86)*		2.24 (.92)**	1.83 (.62)**		1904.97 (586.28)**	495.14 (228.81)*	$p \leqslant .05$
Pseudo R^2	.50	.05		.16	.08				
−2 Log-likelihood	67.57	561.73		−111.97	−624.77				
Chi-square	34.73***	16.97		41.19***	104.11***				
F							2.36*	2.02*	

$^{\dagger}p \leqslant .1$, $^{*}p \leqslant .05$, $^{**}p \leqslant .01$, $^{***}p \leqslant .001$.

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received fewer articles when the motives were drug/gang, dispute, robbery, and others compared to domestic homicides. On the other hand, robbery homicides actually receive significantly more coverage than domestic homicides for black homicides. The findings are significantly different for robbery homicides across victim subgroups and the other motives are marginally significant. The use of a firearm increased coverage of both Hispanic and black victim homicides, but the use of a firearm appeared to be particularly important for Hispanic victim homicides and the subgroup comparison is strongly significant. Homicides involving only a single suspect receive fewer articles coverage compared to multiple suspect homicides for both Hispanic and black homicides, though number of suspects is a somewhat stronger predictor for Hispanic homicides. Black homicides targeting strangers receive significantly more coverage than those targeting known victims. Victim–offender relationship is not a significant predictor of number of articles for Hispanic homicides, and the differences across victim subgroups are not significant.

In addition to news media attention, Table 2 also shows the findings for news prominence measured by the number of specific words written about each homicide that was covered. We found that when black victim homicides were covered by *The Star-Ledger*, older victims were granted more prominent coverage for Hispanic victim homicides, though findings were not significantly different compared to black victim homicides. Both black and Hispanic homicides involving female victims were covered more prominently, but victim gender is a significantly stronger predictor for Hispanic victim homicides. Black victim homicides involving victims with more deviant lifestyles were covered less prominently. Use of firearms increased the number of words written specifically about black victim homicides. This was not the case for Hispanic victim homicides, though the differences across subgroup models were not significant.

Table 3 presents the results for female and male homicide victims. Age and race/ethnicity of the victim did not influence local news print media coverage of female or male homicides. However, male victims with deviant backgrounds are significantly less likely to receive one or more news articles devoted to their homicide. Though not a significant predictor, deviant background has a positive relationship with news media coverage for females. It is interesting that most of the other variables examined did not have any significant effect on female and male victim homicides that were selected for news media coverage. Specifically, the age and race/ethnicity of the suspect, motive for the incident, number of suspects, and victim–offender relationship had no effect. Firearm use compared to other weapons is a significant predictor of news coverage for male homicides, but not for female homicides and the comparison across subgroup is not significant.

Age of the victim had no effect on the number of articles written about male and female victim homicides. Female homicides involving Hispanic victims receive significantly more attention than those homicides involving female victims of other races (primarily black). Interestingly, male

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Table 3 News media coverage of male and female homicide victims

	Covered or not?			Number of specific articles			Number of specific words		
	Female victims ($n = 114$)	Male victims ($n = 752$)		Female victims ($n = 114$)	Male victims ($n = 752$)		Female victims ($n = 114$)	Male victims ($n = 752$)	
	B(SE)	*B*(SE)	*p* value	*B*(SE)	*B*(SE)	*p* value	*B*(SE)	*B*(SE)	*p* value
Victim									
Age	−.01 (.02)	.01 (.01)		−.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)		3.50 (7.81)	4.69 (2.86)†	
Hispanic	−.65 (.82)	−.45 (.39)		.67 (.39)†	−.53 (.25)*		1871.29 (299.40)***	21.73 (109.39)	
Deviant behavior	.06 (.43)	−.26 (.13)*		−.13 (.23)	−.33 (.10)***		−93.41 (164.58)	−110.83 (37.23)**	
Suspect									
Age	.01 (.03)	−.02 (.02)		.00 (.02)	−.00 (.01)		−5.13 (13.42)	−3,01 (4.93)	
Hispanic	.57 (.93)	.55 (.43)		−.06 (.45)	.46 (.26)†		−1767.32 (327.87)***	−143.30 (110.69)	
White/ other	.69 (1.38)	.89 (1.20)		1.06 (.70)	.62 (.81)		546.40 (557.84)	1587.01 (322.02)***	$p \leqslant .1$
Motive									
Drug/gang	−1.04 (1.13)	.37 (.42)		−.49 (.68)	−.01 (.35)		−46.07 (512.16)	−130.24 (132.62)	
Dispute	.11 (.79)	−.03 (.39)		.43 (.45)	−.03 (.31)		−22.45 (314.22)	−74.24 (119.66)	
Robbery	−.14 (1.60)	.17 (.51)		.52 (.76)	.69 (.40)†		1777.72 (520.69)**	59.74 (154.47)	$p \leqslant .01$
Other	−.20 (1.22)	.26 (.48)		−.02 (.69)	.35 (.39)		4927.38 (474.29)***	−70.23 (144.08)	$p \leqslant .001$
Firearm used	.82 (.71)	1.07 (.29)***		.38 (.36)	.64 (.23)**		81.80 (282.10)	200.07 (91.08)	
Single suspects	−1.39 (1.04)	−.07 (.23)		−.31 (.43)	−.42 (.18)*		−120.31 (313.63)	−130.77 (70.35)	
Stranger victim	.03 (1.03)	−.08 (.26)		1.09 (.46)*	.24 (.20)	p⩽.1	−108.69 (381.66)	56.80 (75.15)	
Constant	2.10 (1.37)	.47 (.58)		.29 (.66)	.13 (.50)		792.61 (463.29)†	611.26 (197.20)**	
Pseudo R^2	.150	.08		.10	.08				
−2 Log-	likelihood	87.53	576.69		−130.33	576.17			
Chi-square	8.76	29.38***		27.80**	94.22***				
F							21.77***	5.19***	

$^{\dagger}p \leqslant .1$, $^{*}p \leqslant .05$, $^{**}p \leqslant .01$, $^{***}p \leqslant .001$.

homicides involving Hispanic victims actually receive significantly less news media attention, though the difference across victim subgroup is not significantly different. Male victims with deviant backgrounds receive significantly less news media attention. Deviant background is not a significant predictor for female homicides, though the difference in subgroups is not significant. Age of the suspect had no effect, but male homicides involving Hispanic suspects receive significantly more news media articles compared to black suspects. Though not significant, female homicides involving Hispanic suspects contrastingly receive less attention. Unlike racial/ethnic victim subgroups, motivational circumstances have little influence on evaluations of newsworthiness across gender subgroups. The only notable finding is that robbery motives for male homicides receive more articles than the reference category, domestic homicides. More articles were written specifically about male victim homicides when the weapon was a firearm, but type of weapon had no effect on female victim homicides. Male homicides involving single suspects receive significantly less media coverage compared to multiple suspect homicides. Number of suspects is not a significant predictor of number of articles for female homicides and the differences across gender subgroups is not significant. Female homicides involving targeting stranger victims receive significantly more attention than those targeting known victims. This is not the case for male homicides and the findings across gender are significant ($p \leqslant .1$).

The findings in Table 3 also show how homicide variables predict news media prominence across gender. Victim age was significant for male victim homicides as older victims received more prominent coverage than younger victims. Female victim homicide stories involving Hispanic victims were significantly more likely to be displayed prominently than those involving victims of other races. This was not the case for male victim homicides, though the differences across models were not significant. Male victim homicides involving victims with deviant lifestyles received significantly less words written about them. Interestingly, female victim homicides involving Hispanic suspects were displayed less prominently than those involving suspects of other races. As discussed above, the opposite is true of female victim homicides involving Hispanic victims, which received significantly more words written specifically about them. Homicides involving whites and suspects of other races increased the likelihood of prominent coverage for male victim homicides but not for female victim homicides. These findings were significantly different across gender subsamples. While homicide motives were generally not significant predictors of news media attention across gender subsamples, motive was an important predictor of story prominence for female victim homicide. In particular, female victim homicides involving robbery and other miscellaneous motives were covered more prominently when compared to domestic homicides. This was not the case for male victim homicides and findings are significantly different across gender models.

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Discussion

This study examined the newsworthiness of homicides across victim gender and race/ethnicity (i.e. black and Hispanic) Employing a media distortion analysis, we compared all homicides ($n = 866$) that occurred in the city of Newark, NJ from 1997 to 2007 with homicide coverage in the leading local print news outlet, *The Star-Ledger*. We assessed the effects of incident, suspect, and victim characteristics on the likelihood of news media attention and prominence indicators. Previous studies have often neglected to consider Hispanics when comparing how victims and offenders are represented in the media, and the few studies examining Hispanic victimization in the news focus on electronic media (Bjornstorm et al., 2010; Chiricos & Escholz, 2002). In addition, while prior research has considered how race and gender influence news media coverage, studies have neglected to consider what case attributes make homicides involving specific victim subsets newsworthy. That is, while we may know that female victims receive more news coverage than males, how female victim homicide newsworthiness varies across cases remained unexplored. The current study makes a contribution to the literature by not assuming that all homicide victim subsets are equally newsworthy.

One perspective on constructing crime news stories focuses on how organizational demands shape news media decision-making, and thus, crime news content. Due to the constant flow of potential crime news items, news organizations' need to make quick decisions regarding story selection prominence. Novel or extraordinary circumstances help reporters in quickly evaluating crime story newsworthiness. In addition, we expected that homicides considered "more serious" would receive relatively more news media attention and would be displayed more prominently. There was partial support for our expectations overall. Homicides carried out with a firearm and with multiple suspects generally received increased news media coverage. The novelty of interracial homicides was also considered especially newsworthy in general. We also expected that news media's shared understanding of vulnerable or "worthy victims" would shape news decision-making. Our expectations were again partially supported overall as female homicide victims received more news media attention and were displayed more prominently than their male counterparts, while other variables that tap into vulnerability did not receive ample support. This partial support may be due to perceptions of vulnerability varying by victim type. In the case of females, gender typifications elicit perceptions of vulnerability independent of age and other factors. Research that has examined victim worthiness and vulnerability has traditionally examined overall homicides. As a result, one can assume that these factors may be more important with other types of victims when compared to females.

Related to the notion that distinct types of victim elicit varying media attention, it was also expected that evaluations of newsworthiness would vary by the race/ethnicity and gender of homicide victims. In other words, what

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makes a black homicide newsworthy does not necessarily make a Hispanic homicide newsworthy. An important difference in predictors of newsworthiness across homicide victim race/ethnicity was homicide motive. For Hispanic victims, we found that all homicides involving motives other than domestic disputes were considered less newsworthy. Motive was not a significant predictor of news attention or prominence for black victim homicides. Moreover, homicides involving robbery motives actually received significantly more news media attention when selected for coverage than domestic dispute homicides for black victims. This is interesting as Hispanic victims are actually proportionately more likely to be the targets of robbery homicides compared to black victims. Another difference in predictors of newsworthiness across victim race/ethnicity was in the deviant behaviors of victims. Victim deviant behavior was a significant predictor of number of articles and number of words for black victims, but not for Hispanic victims. These findings better reflect the nature of Newark homicide victimization, as black victims tend to have substantially higher deviance scores compared to Hispanics.

Another interpretation of these differences across racial/ethnic victim groups is that unique cultural typifications of black and Hispanic homicide victims shape evaluations of newsworthiness. Black homicide victims, who are most always killed by black suspects, may be scripted as part of the larger social problem of urban black-on-black violence among youth in high-crime and high-poverty neighborhoods. Past research has shown that media portray black-on-black violence as one aspect of a dangerous and predatory subculture in which males become involved in crime at a young age (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Pizarro et al., 2007). This "super predator" script was promoted by criminologists in the mid-1990s and characterized young offenders as aggressive, short sighted, remorseless killers who largely target other young black males (Bennett, Dilulio, & Walters, 1996; Fox, 1996). On the other hand, it is possible that Hispanics do not yet fit well within this narrative of violence. Although news media coverage of Hispanics often involves negative imagery (e.g. illegal immigration), Hispanic victims of violence have mostly been ignored. It is possible that news media are required to rely on alternative cultural stereotypes in their framing of Hispanic homicides. For instance, media scripts of Hispanic homicides may be based on cultural stereotypes of Hispanic males as "macho" or "hot-blooded" and greatly concerned with maintaining family honor. These stereotypes, along with possible stereotypes of Hispanic females as sexual objects, may help explain why Hispanic domestic dispute homicides are considered especially newsworthy.

Although female victims received more news media coverage regardless of their race, the results suggest that some female homicides are more newsworthy than others, and that the factors that make a female homicide newsworthy are different than those of male homicides. Deviant behavior does not appear to matter in determining whether or not, and how female homicide victims are covered, though it did for males. This finding ran counter to our expectations, as we hypothesized that female victims involved in deviant lifestyles would receive less news media attention. Instead, it appears that female homicide

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victims in Newark, who are primarily black, continue to be held less responsible for their own victimization. This contradicts what others have found regarding the news media's tendency to blame black female victims of violence (Anastasio & Costa, 2004; Meyers, 2004). To support this assertion, female victims of seemingly random violence by strangers were significantly more newsworthy than other female victims. It could be that female victims of stranger violence are viewed as the most "vulnerable" and least responsible for their own victimization. Again, this was not the case for male homicide victims. This is interesting as males are much more likely to become the victims of stranger violence in Newark than females. Popular wisdom fueled by high profile domestic violence homicides against females may also shape expectations about female homicide victims. While nearly 12% of female victims are killed in drug/gang-related homicides and over 25% of females are killed as the result of disputes other than domestic disputes, these homicide motives may not be considered especially newsworthy because they conflict with the traditional narrative of female homicides.

Overall, these findings suggest that homicide seriousness and scripts are indeed very important in determining which incidents receive news coverage. First, homicides that based on their characteristics are perceived as more serious and risky to society are more likely to receive media attention. Incidents involving strangers and firearms tend to evoke feelings of fear among citizens because they can illustrate the facility of ending a person's life, as well as the notion that anyone can be a victim, not just those individuals who are part of dangerous relationships. These perceptions of homicide seriousness can serve to increase the audience of news outlet since individuals would be more interested in learning about things that may affect them. These same perceptions of seriousness do not only impact whether a homicide is covered in the news, but how it is processed in the criminal justice system (see Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2000; Steffensmeier et al., 1998) suggesting that these factors are interrelated. Homicide scripts are also important in determining newsworthiness. Scripts based on the cultural typifications of Hispanic and black males, as well as female victims, affect how these victims are portrayed in the news. Interestingly, these same scripts may contribute to perceptions of which homicides are considered more serious, and they perpetuate themselves. That is, scripts employed in homicide coverage contribute to popular ethnic and cultural stereotypes, which in turn contribute to which future homicides will be considered newsworthy.

There are a number of potential implications for emphasizing and de-emphasizing some homicide occurrences in the news based on perceived seriousness and cultural stereotypes of victims. The public relies on the news media for its information about crime and the response to crime by criminal justice agencies (Surette, 1998; Yanich, 2005), thus distorted representations of the current homicide problem can increase the fear of crime and of some racial/ethnic groups. Furthermore, emphasizing homicide occurrences in the press that align with racist and sexist stereotypes will continue to reproduce stereotypical race and gender-based images and socially constructed categories

of homicide participants. Consequently, reporters and news making bureaucrats should be very cautious in their selection of crimes to cover in media outlets. The most practical of solutions to the problem of misrepresentation of crime and homicide in the news is for news outlets to report all the homicides that occur in a municipality instead of simply a subset of cases. Cities like Los Angeles have already implemented a similar strategy. Additionally, it might be a fruitful effort for criminologists to work with media outlets in order to educate them, and ultimately the public on homicide and crime patterns.

Conclusion

While the results presented here are supportive of previous research, this study is not without limitations. Although the data-set employed in this study is very rich, it still lacks important variables that tap into the newsmaking process. Specifically, data on factors related to the ideology of *The Star-Ledger* or the decision making processes of the crime reporters were not examined in this study. As mentioned earlier, Newark is a city that has experienced a homicide problem for the past three decades, and in which the minority population is comprised of whites and not Hispanics or blacks. The findings from this study; however, may be generalizable to other cities throughout the country with similar social and demographic characteristics, and those experiencing similar social characteristics and homicide problems (e.g. Detroit, MI, Flint, MI, Compton, CA, etc.). Future research should replicate the methods of this study in other locations, in order to examine the generalizability of the findings presented here. Given the seriousness of homicide and the social and political impact it has on communities, it is imperative for scholars to understand the mechanisms that influence local news reporting of this crime.

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